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acteristic vocabularies and styles of the great literary writers of English are to be identified through the possession which they show of the fine shades of meaning as well as the possession of newly attained powers to express moods of the soul. Their refinements of taste, their lofty aspirations and subtle thoughts, are all made possible of expression by skill in using the Latin and Greek derivatives which reenforce the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary by a wealth of words three times as numerous as that derived from the old English.

SAPPHO AND PHAON¹

The appearance of any work of literature associated with the name of the greatest of women poets inevitably arouses a doubly eager anticipation. No one can fail to be moved by the remembrance that Sappho was, by general agreement, the greatest lyric poet of antiquity: her fame was next to that of Homer himself. And the fact that not more than two complete poems and a hundred fragments survive makes any new treatment of her work important. One complete poem, the Ode to Anactoria, remains because Longinus enshrined it in his treatise *On the Sublime*, as a perfect example of the height of eloquence. Another, the Ode to Aphrodite, which is perhaps complete, was preserved for a like reason by Dionysius of Halicarnassus; and the remaining fragments survive chiefly because of similar quotation by other Greek writers from Aristotle to Plutarch, and later. Something of the spirit of Sappho's complete work is preserved in imitations by Theocritus and Bion, Catullus, Vergil and Horace, and by other ancient poets. The fragments themselves—"the supreme success, the final achievement, of the poetic art", every word having "a peculiar and unmistakable perfume, a seal of absolute perfection and inimitable grace"—have inspired Byron, Moore, Tennyson, Rosetti, Swinburne, and other modern poets. They are collected in Theodor Bergk's *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*. A literal translation and numerous selected renderings in English are presented in Henry Thornton Wharton's *Sappho* (London, 1885, and later editions).

Concerning the life of the poet we know very little. It seems certain that she was of Lesbos, and had about her a group of maidens whom she inspired to music and poetry. Apparently she lived about the beginning of the sixth century B. C., at Mitylene; she was of aristocratic family, her brother Larichus being a public cupbearer. Fragments of her verses are addressed to him and to another brother; one to the poet Alcaeus; others to Cleis, a little maid, her daughter.

Sappho's conspicuous position as a woman poet, however, early gave rise to legend. The satiric comedy of the third century B. C. dwelt much upon her, as it did upon Plato and Demosthenes. The

old stories of Phaon and a leap into the sea were first associated with her name at this time. And there were numerous others, one of a happy marriage to a man of her own rank, a ripe old age, and an honored grave. The former tradition, however, prevailed until it became permanently fixed by the Latin Epistle of Sappho to Phaon, attributed to Ovid, and available in English in the translation of Alexander Pope (1707). This furnishes the foundation for the Sappho and Phaon of John Lilly, the Euphuist (1584); and of the Austrian poet Grillparzer's Sappho (1819), which still holds the stage and may be read in English in the translation of Ellen Frothingham (Boston, 1876). The German critic Friedrich Gottlieb Welcher (1816 and after) and, later, Professor Comparetti cleared away certain accusations against the character of the poet; while many critics have aided a juster view of her work by emphasizing her exquisite treatment of nature, music, poetry, and the cultivation of the spirit, as well as her supreme power as a poet of love. Gounod's first opera, *Sappho* (1851), and Alma-Tadema's paintings are characteristic tributes to her from the realms of art and music.

In Mr. Mackaye's play a prose Prologue relates the finding, during the excavation of the private theatre of Varius at Herculaneum, of a manuscript tragedy, *Sappho and Phaon*, by that author. In the Induction, the actors discuss their life, with one another, and their art, with Varius and his guests Horace and Vergil, before whom they rehearse a part of the tragedy. The Prelude, after elaborate stage directions, presents a score of hexameter lines, spoken by Prologus.

The scene of the tragedy proper, which remains unchanged throughout, except for the varied coloring of evening, night and morning, is a promontory, overlooking the Aegean sea, the sound of which is an undertone throughout the play. The setting is an olive grove, a Doric temple, an altar to Aphrodite, a fire-urn of Poseidon, and statues of both gods. The play is written chiefly in iambic pentameter blank verse, interspersed with short-lined lyrics and elevated passages in trochaic or dactylic hexameter. Yet other passages are in notably excellent sapphics. Act one presents Sappho's pupil Atthis, betrothed to her mistress's brother Larichus, and Anactoria, whom the poet Alcaeus has deserted to woo Sappho. Alcaeus quarrels with Pittacus, tyrant of Mitylene, another of Sappho's wooers, whose blow at Alcaeus strikes Phaon, a slave whom Sappho loves at sight. Sappho reproves Alcaeus for his inconstancy and Pittacus for his serenity, and buys from Phaon, as an offering to Aphrodite, a sea-dove he would sacrifice to Poseidon in order that his sick child may be healed. In act two Sappho, in the garb of her brother Larichus, with a key from Pittacus, unlocks Phaon's slave-yoke. Together they fly from the

¹ *Sappho and Phaon. A Tragedy.* By Percy Mackaye. New York: The Macmillan Co. (1907).

wrath of Alcaeus, whom Phaon has struck with his own spear. In act third the chill and fog of the sea affright Phaon, who, striking in the dark at Alcaeus, kills his own boy. Thalassa, his slave-wife, appears with his dead babe, and Phaon returns to her in spite of Sappho's entreaties. Sappho leaps from the promontory into the fog, and the scene changes gradually to the excavation of the Prologue, for a prose Epilogue of half a dozen lines. Two prose Interludes present, between the acts of the tragedy, a pantomime of Hercules, drunken and overmastered by Omphale. This burlesque theme rather detracts from the dignity of the remainder of the piece, and its treatment offers little that is pleasing besides some Cupid and Psyche dances. These interludes are appropriately relegated to the appendix of the book.

The combined prologue, induction, prelude, interludes, and epilogue extend to half the compass of the tragedy itself, allowing that to be only three-fourths as long as the author's Jeanne D'Arc of last year. There is thus assembled a quantity of material sufficient to satisfy the convention of dramatic bulk, without the addition of seemingly adventitious details as in the earlier play. The approach to the *milieu* of the Greek tragedy by way of the Roman induction, and to that by way of the modern prologue, is a successful and happy device for producing that "willing suspension of disbelief" which Coleridge considered essential to the enjoyment of poetry.

The prologue, however, in causing an emotional archaeology to triumph over one that is scientific, revives, perhaps for the sake of dramatic conflict, an old antagonism that other poets have rather tried to reconcile. Without the careful determination of many details, the prologue's praise of "the art, the loveliness, the knowledge of the ancient world" might easily be misplaced; and any true realization of the race's "one continuity of passion and of pain" would be impossible. This large conception, which is fundamental to the entire work, is admirably expressed in the prelude, although in language too abstract for vocal speech.

The atmosphere of Roman life is restored both with imagination and with sufficient accuracy, in the induction, which is one-fifth as long as the tragedy. The poet Varius did write at least one play on a Greek theme, and was the friend of both Horace and Vergil, who are represented with the urbanity and the gentleness respectively associated with their names. The induction's defence of acting is spirited, and its tetrameter verse is vital throughout and frequently admirable.

The historic personages in the tragedy, it must be confessed, remind one of Freytag's "How difficult and perilous it is to make use artistically of an historical life!" Alcaeus is presented as an em-

bodiment of the lawlessness traditionally attributed to his life, rather than as the creator of such poetic images as "the ship of state"; while Pittacus, famed for his nobility and wisdom as one of the seven sages of Greece, is represented as raging against the man whom he actually freed from imprisonment. And it must be stated, regretfully, that the heroine of the play, also, is drawn from tradition rather than from history, and drawn from a tradition which traduces the authentic Sappho of the fragments. This is the more strange since a dozen of the fragments are paraphrased in the tragedy; all accurately, and some with rare charm. But a dozen more—of garlands and dancing, of evening and dawn, of love and longing, of sacrifice and prayer—are unused, although they are almost demanded by the situation and language of the play. Nor is use made of scores of others which would both have enriched the language of the drama and given a truer character of her who sang of the "silver moon" and "the golden-sandaled dawn", of "spring's messenger, the sweet-voiced nightingale", and of serving "the violet-weaving muses" with "sweeter tone than harp, more gold than gold".

But if it be regretted that Mr. Mackaye has endeavored to embody not "the poetess of all time" but "the eternal maiden and her lover", it is doubly unfortunate that he has chosen a tradition that is inconsistent with our modern conception of his heroine, and that he has developed it in a way that does violence to what we actually know of her. The authentic Sappho praised worth, wisdom, restraint, maidenly delicacy, and maternal affection, and she repeatedly satirized rusticity. In the play, unrestrained love makes her reject a poet and a ruler for a slave, for whom she competes against his wife and children. And there are numerous other points of conflict.

Even, however, if one agree with Dryden that "the story is the least part . . . it is fancy that gives the life-touches", the heroine's love for Phaon would not seem to be justified by this standard. He, throughout, is fearful rather than heroic, indifferent rather than ardent. Neither beauty nor charm is attributed to him, although both were given him to an irresistible degree by Aphrodite in the ancient legend which Lilly uses, but which Mr. Mackaye quotes only up to the point which would solve the problem. Without some such reason, and lacking the ardor attributed to her in the Latin Epistle of Sappho to Phaon, Sappho's strength is turned to weakness, her wisdom becomes folly. The new invention, too, of her conflict with Phaon's slave-wife, Thalassa, leaves Sappho far less pleasing in our eyes than does Grillparzer's fable, in which Sappho resigns young Phaon, who worships her as a goddess, to her pupil Melitta whom he loves, with the conclusion "Ich suchte dich und habe mich gefunden"!

Authenticity, consistency, and dramatic intensity, then, can scarcely be granted to Mr. Mackaye's tragedy; but it does possess many passages of strength and fineness. The atmosphere of the setting, the cadence of the sea, and the gloom of the drifting fog, are sensible throughout. And the fundamental conflict between Poseidon and Aphrodite is impressively indicated. Sappho's contrast between man's love and woman's, her praise of poetry, and her final address to Poseidon and to Aphrodite are all memorable.

This last speech deserves quotation, both as the one unquestionably dramatic passage of the tragedy, and also as indicating the mastery of diction and metre to which its lines not infrequently attain.

God of the generations, pain, and death,
I bow to thee. Not for love's sake is love's
Fierce happiness, but for the after-race.
Yet....., why must we
Rapturous beings of the spray and storm
That chanting, beat our hearts against thy shores
Of aspiration—ebb? ebb and return
Into the songless deep? are we no more
Than foam upon thy garment?

Another wave has broken at your feet
And, moaning, wanes into oblivion.
But not its radiance. That flashes back
Into the morning, and shall flame again
Over a myriad waves. That flame am I,
Nor thou, Poseidon, shalt extinguish me.
My spirit is thy changeling, and returns
To her, who glows beyond the stars of birth—
To her, who is herself Time's passion star.

If, however, it be deduced from the foregoing that Mr. Mackaye's work, when tested by the severest ideals, appears not so much dramatic as narrative, reflective and idyllic, it must be remembered that he has proposed for himself the most difficult of all poetic tasks, and one in which even partial success is a distinction. To select rightly from an infinite richness of material in a time when the literary atmosphere is yet but partially dramatic, to combine capability for powerful emotion with clarity of vision and a knowledge of the outer world, to be both plastic to his theme and in command of it, both ardent and deliberate, creative and critical, to master both character and action, atmosphere and detail, to possess both power of construction and of utterance, to meet the requirements both of poetry and of truth, of the actor and the public—these are but a few of the impossible things to which a dramatic poet must attain.

As it is, Mr. Mackaye has already, young as he is, made four contributions to American poetic drama, worthy to be ranked with those of its masters, Longfellow, George Henry Boker, Bayard Taylor, and Richard Hovey. And Sappho and Phaon indicates an advance in coherence and clarity over Jeanne D'Arc, as that did in scope over Fenris, the

Wolf, and as that did in power over *The Canterbury Tales*. And in each case, Mr. Mackaye's choice of subject has given his work a freshness, and his gifts of diction and metre have given it a power and beauty seldom shown by the work of any of his American contemporaries.

TEACHERS COLLEGE

CLYDE FURST

CLASSICAL CONFERENCE AT SYRACUSE

Syracuse did herself proud in her hospitable treatment of the strangers within her gates on the occasion of the meeting of the New York State Teachers' Association during the late holiday recess. A much appreciated form of attention was the provision by the Chamber of Commerce of a large number of books of street-car tickets, thus encouraging the visitors to visit the new University stadium and other points of interest. The meeting was largely attended and was in the highest degree successful.

It is probable that the most profitable feature of the gathering was the meeting of the several department conferences, which occupied all of Friday, December 27. The Classical Association had two largely attended sessions on that day, occupying between five and six hours in the aggregate, a palpable advantage over the recent classical conference in the City College uncomfortably jammed into a single hour at the close of a long day's session.

It is a regrettable fact that from its very nature the most attractive feature of the Classical Conference program can receive only a brief passing notice. Reference is here made to the illustrated lecture by Prof. Edgar A. Emens of Syracuse University on the Pre-Persian Sculptures of the Acropolis. Like many other instructors of our up-to-date institutions of higher learning, Prof. Emens believes in the efficacy of a good stereopticon with carefully selected and prepared slides as an instrument of instruction, and he has made so excellent use of his opportunities for travel in Greece that he justly deserves to be ranked as an authority of distinction in the field of Grecian antiquities, though his natural modesty would doubtless forbid his making such a claim for himself. It is to be hoped that Prof. Emens may have an early opportunity of producing the same lecture in the metropolis, affording all classical teachers of the Greater City an entertainment of high cultural value.

Without the instructive charts with which was fortified the discussion of Comparative Grammar in Secondary Schools, it is impossible to do justice to the able paper by Mr. John P. MacHarg of the Greek Department of the Auburn High School. Holding that modern language students without a preliminary training in the Latin should be kept apart from those enjoying this great advantage, Mr. MacHarg said in part: